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Dell Latitude D430 User Review

by Greg Ross

The Dell Latitude D430 is Dell's current ultraportable offering that features the Ultra Low Voltage (ULV) Core Solo, ULV Core Duo, ULV Core 2 Duo, and a host of other technologies in order to create one of the smallest 12.1" machines that still maintains a respectable amount of battery life and computing power. With so many questions and details to cover about ultraportable notebooks, continue reading this full review!

Reasons for Buying

About two months after trading my 15.4" HP nc8430 for a 17" HP 8710p under a warranty replacement (see my user notes for reviews on both notebooks), some of my college work load required constant access to my personal PC. After several weeks of carrying around my 17" notebook with all my books and notes, I was more than ready to consider getting a smaller notebook.

The 8710p is still one of the lightest 17" notebooks out there, but I needed something drastically lighter to travel inside of my well-stuffed bookbag.

After looking into the lower cost solutions available, I finally decided that if I wanted a really small, really portable computer with my budget I was going to have to get a gently used one. I had my eye on a lower end D430 from the Outlet, and once I nabbed a 15% off coupon from eBay (with purchase of an upgrade to the three year gold support warranty) I was ready. In to the Dell Outlet, and out with the D430.

Price & Model Specifications

The D430 starts out at a not-so-light $1,199…which is actually an amazing price to me given ultraportables usually carry a premium price for their slim designs. From the Dell Outlet, the D430 is regularly available for around $1000 and may include some upgraded hardware.

My specific unit was configured as follows:

- Intel Core Solo U1400 Processor (Santa Rosa, 1.2GHz, 2MB L2 Cache, Ultra Low Voltage)
- Microsoft Genuine Windows XP Professional
- 12.1" WXGA Display (1280 x 800)
- 1GB DDR2 533MHz RAM (upgraded to 2GB aftermarket)
- 80GB 4200RPM Toshiba 1.8" HDD
- External D-Port CD-RW/DVD-ROM Optical Drive
- 802.11a/b/g WiFi, Ethernet, and Modem
- 6-Cell 42Whr Battery
- 3-Year Next Business Day At-Home & Gold Technical Support Warranty
- Dimensions: 11.6" W x 8.25" D x 1" H

- Weight: 3.2lbs (with battery, without optical drive)

Brand new, and without my extra warranty upgrade, this configuration of the D430 would cost $1,640 before taxes. With my warranty upgrade, the system would cost about $1,800-$1,900 brand new. Additionally, the single-core D430 is only available in the Large Business section at www.dell.com.

The Small Business section (where consumers can purchase from too!), only the dual core variant is available. A similarly dual-core configured laptop costs about $1,650, so there is virtually no price difference between a U1400 laptop and a U7600 laptop.

I got the single core version because I needed a lower cost machine, and this was the lowest I could get. I purchased the warranty upgrade only to take advantage of the 15% off Latitudes at the Dell Outlet coupon, and paid $883 for the entire package. Not bad for almost 50 percent off!

Build and Design

Business notebooks are supposed to be the top-of-the-line laptops, with the highest build quality and top notch support. My last two notebooks were both high-quality business notebooks, and I have come to expect the best in my notebooks.

With ultraportable machines, there is an even higher emphasis and these laptops must be built as solid as possible. They get carried around more, used more, knocked around more, and have to be built for road warriors. Does the D430 deliver?

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Undoubtedly. The D430 may possibly be the most solid notebook I have ever held in my hands despite its feather-light weight. The entire chassis is constructed of magnesium alloy, but some of the laptop's black exterior "plating" I believe is still made of a very solid plastic material. Other parts of the notebook, like the base of the chassis or the inside frame of the LCD screen are solid metal alloy. The notebook chassis is extremely well built and cannot be twisted or pushed around at all. The palm rests are the only part of the base that flexes, but I believe that is because only the battery is found underneath that location. When pushing in and prodding around the rest of the notebook base, it became very clear to me the D430 is very well packed inside and has a very strong frame to support/protect the entire chassis.

When closed, the laptop seems virtually indestructible.(view large image)

The screen construction is also impressive, but not as much as the chassis' construction. As with most laptop screens, the display can be twisted a little bit … but not nearly as much as other laptops I have

encountered. The bezel has one small weak spot at the inside vertical edges, and when pushing in on the LCD screen from up top I can produce some ripples on the screen. Is either a lot? Would it possibly be enough to damage the screen? No on both counts, but as with any notebook do not act out any of your dreams of dropping bricks directly onto the notebook. When in my backpack or another tight spot, I have not needed to worry about the screen protection. I have included a video illustrating the squeeze effect, but I am pressing VERY hard to produce the ripples.

This is the only weak spot in the bezel.

Other parts of the notebook are sturdy as well. The hard drive on the D430 features hardware-based shock protection (I never saw evidence of a hardware and software based solution like the Fujitsu E8410, HP 8710p, or HP nc8430), and the keyboard/mousepad area has absolutely no flex so all those computer parts directly underneath your working area are perfectly safe.

Coming in at a meager 12" in size, the D430 is definitely a feather-of-a-notebook. When placed in my backpack, I really do not notice the extra weight and it is no trouble to take with me every day. The only bad thing about such a light laptop is that if you leave it behind somewhere, you are not going to notice a huge weight lifted off your shoulders. From experience, I've had to learn to check a little more carefully to make sure the laptop is not left behind.

Another feature that needs mentioning is the DVD drive, or lack thereof. The D430 managed to achieve its incredible thinness by ditching an internal DVD drive and going with an external Dell-specific-version-of-USB external USB DVD drive that can run off of the notebook's power mains to minimize the cable requirements. For users that do not need an optical drive very often, this will be perfectly fine. Users who need it more frequently may find themselves wondering if they'd want to carry around a second piece of equipment. I myself do not find it annoying to be missing a drive whatsoever, as I rarely need to use an optical drive during normal usage. I love having the option to shed some backpack weight and leave the DVD drive at home, but some may not.

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As far as appearances go, this is a business notebook. Appropriately so, the D430 features a mostly black and gun-metal gray visual design. When compared to the design of the HP Compaq business notebooks, I would say that (1) the exterior of the Latitudes does not look as sharp but (2) the interior sections of the D430 look more professional and sharper.

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The exterior of the D430 (aka the back of the LCD screen and the bottom of the notebook) appears to be almost 100 percent gun-metal gray, which is a design feature that we've seen in Latitudes for a long time. It's getting kind of old, but it still looks nice. But an update would be nicer. The interior of the D430 is really what looks nice and professional. The lines are sharper and the overall appearance is more visually appealing than what I have been using for the last year and a half. Edges are more of a rounded shape, unlike the HP's physically sharper and straight edges.

When closed, the D430 reminds you of a thin workbook or textbook. In fact, the dimensions of the D430 are fairly close to standard 8.5"x11" paper and I regularly carry my D430 inside of a stack of notes and books. For a college student, this is really nice as you can move around with all of that in your hands and not have a problem with any of it. Try moving a 17" notebook with a few paper notebooks on top and see how awkward it is, and then you'll understand why one can appreciate the size of the 12" D430.

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Screen and Speaker

The D430 features a standard 12" WXGA screen with a total resolution of 1280×800 pixels. Widescreen has pretty much become the standard for all notebooks, and I do have to say that it is nice to have this much horizontal real-estate.

The screen resolution itself is just right for a 12" notebook display, as for me all text and graphics easily readable. If you want to see a 12" screen for yourself, head to a local store that carries notebooks and try to find any 12" notebook there.

The screen itself is manufactured by Samsung (SEC), which is a 12.1" WXGA screen with a resolution of 1280×800. Many readers will wonder how a 12.1" screen could possibly be productive. Having a small, portable machine allows you to work virtually anywhere, which is better than having a larger screen in my eyes.

However, I do acknowledge that a smaller screen does require some multitasking sacrifices. Most programs do need to be maximized in order to really have an effective layout of the GUI, and exceptions are few and far between. Word, Outlook, Firefox, etc. … all of them need to be maximized for best performance while you are doing your individual tasks. Multitasking is going to require tabbing through all the windows or using your mouse to navigate. Personally, I find this mode of working acceptable given the tasks that are typically going to run on the D430.

Head on, the screen itself is very high quality. Text and graphics are very sharp, and the backlighting seems to be very even for all levels of brightness.

Not too shabby I might say… (view large image)

Speaking of levels of brightness, the D430 is quite impressive in this regard. At a minimum setting, the screen does get fairly dark but it is still easy to work with under most office lighting conditions (or classroom lighting conditions). When more luminosity is required, the screen can certainly deliver. At the brightest level, you can easily read the screen from any non-outdoor environment. Outside, one may have to struggle a little bit to see the screen depending on the weather and the sun. In fact, the brightest screen setting makes the screen even brighter than my fiancée's D820 laptop at her highest setting.

Pictures comparing the D430 to an HP 8710p are shown below. My camera loves to correct for illumination problems, so the darkest (left) and brightest (right) pictures actually look about the same. But, notice that the brightness levels between the 8710p and D430 are about the same.

Darkest settings (view large image)

Brightest settings (view large image)

The HP 8710p up against the D430 in a screen contest. Darkest to the left, brightest to the right.

Finally, the screen does have a built-in ambient light sensor that can automatically adjust the brightness of the screen. When using that feature, I have found that the sensor does accurately determine how bright the screen should be for me to work effectively. This is a welcome improvement on the HP ambient light sensor, which has consistently set the screen to too dim of a setting for me to work effectively for the past year and a half. I might actually leave the sensor enabled on the D430 instead of disabling it like I did with the HP machines.

Viewing angles are a bit of a mixed story. Vertical viewing angles are below average, but with such a small screen I have a hard time imagining that users would be looking in from those directions. Horizontal viewing angles are average, though the graphics on the screen tend to white out just a little bit when viewing from the side. If and when you are sharing a screen view with a co-worker or buddy, both of you should enjoy a relatively decent view. Pictures are worth much more than words, so see the graphic below for an illustration.

(view large image)

Notice the title of this section was "Screen and **Speaker.**" That is because the D430 only has one speaker, and not a very good one at that. While it does function well enough to emit the occasional "You have mail" sound clip or make the "Windows prompt" beep, that is all it is good for. Listening to any type of movie or music on the D430′s internal speaker is a painful experience, and my fiancée actually asked me to stop playing music on the D430 at least once.

The speaker volume levels are fine for the laptop, but the speaker has an extraordinarily tinny aura to it. And there is no bass whatsoever. I would expect even an average speaker to be able to sound out a little bit of the baser notes in music, but this one

fails utterly. Every time I listen to a music track or movie the sound has no depth and it feels and sounds like something is missing.

To try and get around this, I tried using the headphone jack on the D430 with a pair of Creative earphones that are known to work well enough to my satisfaction on other machines. Even then, the D430′s sound system disappointed so I know it is not just the lack of decent speakers. It is the lack of a better-than-low-quality integrated sound card. Granted, a business person probably will not have much use for the integrated speaker when making presentations, but I'm sure anyone would appreciate being able to listen to music. Furthermore, if a user hooked this laptop up to an external speaker set for a presentation, that user better not plan on using complex sounds and music clips. I just do not think this audio system would cut it.

The only interesting gripe I have is that the driver for the audio system seems to occasionally self-destruct. I have had to reinstall the drivers five times since I started using the laptop, and all I ever did was reboot occasionally and evaluate the computer. Fortunately, the drivers always seem to install automatically on the next reboot. But this activity is annoying. (A friend recently suggested I install different audio codecs, so it is possible that the drivers are sensitive to your codec packages. Any user with the Realtek C-Major Audio system may want to keep that in mind.)

Dell, fix the speaker before you release an update to the D430. And fix the driver.

Processor and Performance

As an ultraportable machine, the D430 features Intel's latest ULV (ultra low voltage) processors. They're designed from the ground up to run on a minimum amount of power, not output much heat, and performance is definitely a secondary concern to battery life. Even more interesting is the ULV series is one of the few Intel processors that still offer single-core processors that consume even less power.

The D430′s U1400 is the latest single-core ULV from Intel and consumes about 5.5W, whereas the latest ULV dual-core U7600 consumes about 9W. More powerful processor means less battery life and more heat, and these two reasons are exactly why I choose the U1400 over the U7600 when purchasing this notebook. Ultraportable's main concern is overall battery life and just getting those 'relatively simple' tasks done on the fly without needing to carry around a bulkier notebook. One does not need a lot of power for the general office tasks, which is what the D430 is marketed for.

Single-core processor? Is that not a pretty old (and almost obsolete) technology? For mainstream notebooks, yes. But the D430′s single-core U1400 is definitely capable of performing to my satisfaction, and a single-core processor is a perfect solution for extending the battery life.

Before any benchmarks were done, a fresh copy of XP was installed and the system updated. It was always plugged in and set to the "Always ON" power profile.

PCMark05 is a synthetic benchmark that gives users a general idea of how powerful any processor is, and the D430 came in with a final score of **1454**. A little more optimization could probably have yielded a slightly higher score, but one should expect to be within 100 points of this benchmark under most circumstances.

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In addition to the raw PCMark score provided by the benchmark, the D430 has the following detailed ratings.

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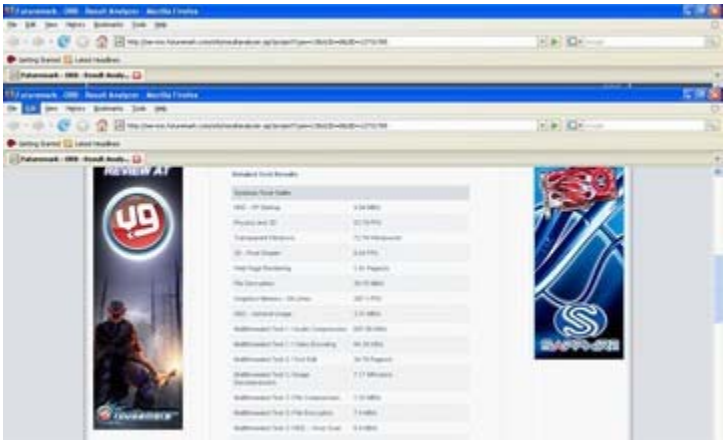
SuperPI and wPrime are programs that are useful in testing the computational abilities of processors, but wPrime is not as useful for single core processors.



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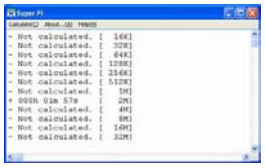

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SuperPI, which forces the processor to calculate the first 2M digits of PI, clocks in with a final time of **1m 57s**. wPrime, which finds a ton of prime numbers, comes in with a total time of **148.344s**. Neither score is particularly impressive, but remember that the D430 is built for office tasks and portability, not extreme number crunching (though you could do it if you were willing to give the processor time to finish). Office/general-usage users will notice no performance problems.

From a little bit of research I've been doing, it appears that these two scores would indicate that the 1.2GHz U1400 is about as powerful as a Pentium M processor running at 1.8GHz or a Pentium 4 running somewhere in the 2.5-3.0GHz range. I do not know for sure what the equivalent AMD processors would be, but I would estimate that an AMD Turion @ 1.8-2.0GHz range would probably perform about as well.

Another point about ultraportable notebooks is that they usually feature only 1.8" hard drives, most of which perform at only 4200RPM speeds. The smaller size of the hard drive really helps keep the size of these notebooks down, as well as keep a low weight. Several 5400RPM drives are now available in the 1.8" form factor, but those will drain more battery life and generate more heat.

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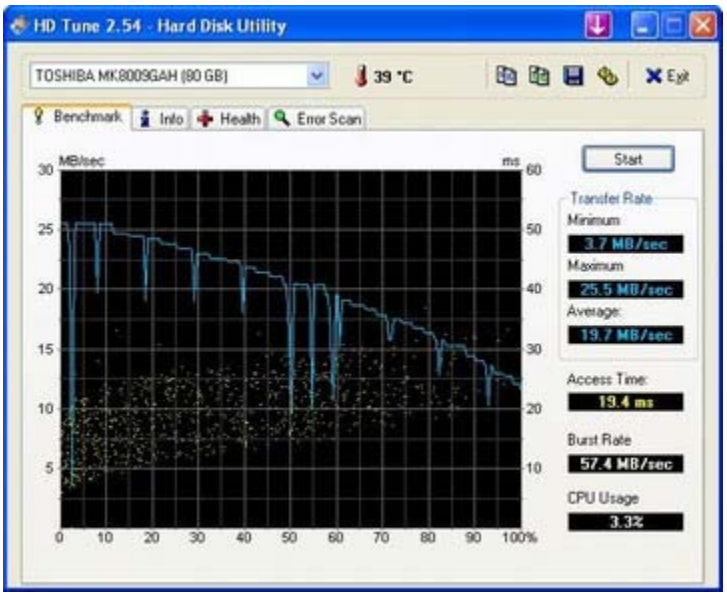

As shown, the transfer rate of the D430's 4200RPM drive is rather low, but this is to be expected for a smaller and slower drive. SSD drives are available for the D430 and would eliminate this bottleneck. Another thing to mention is that the HDD is a PATA/IDE drive, which means you'll need to pay attention to make sure you get a compatible drive if you ever upgrade anything.

Lastly, the D430 comes equipped with the Intel GMA 950 IGP. Oddly enough, Intel choose to keep the GMA 950 as the IGP of choice for the ULV platform. The performance of the GMA 950 has been well documented since it came out some time ago, but we'll summarize a little bit here with a benchmark score.

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(view large image)

With a score of **348**, it is obvious that the D430 will not be playing the latest games. Sure, it will play Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Final Fantasy VII & VIII, the original Neverwinter Nights, and maybe even the original Halo game. But anything that is not at least a few years old is going to choke this card. Halo is pushing it, as at the lowest settings it is barely playable, so I think I'll stick to Solitaire thank you very much.

This particular IGP, or any IGP, is chosen not to play games but to do its basic office jobs while drawing a minimum amount of power. The D430 is no exception, and while you can have a little fun with this laptop it is primarily an office machine.

Well, all these benchmark programs cannot really say how the average user is going to feel about a computer, so on with my personal opinions regarding performance.

Even though the processor is only a single core 1.2GHz processor (which furthermore runs around 800MHz when self-downclocking with its SpeedStep technology), during general usage I do not feel that the laptop is slow. All of the Microsoft Office applications perform well enough, though Outlook does occasionally freeze up at the start. Playing music and typing this review did not pose any problems, and Firefox runs just as fast as it would on my desktop system. In fact, FF only starts having problems with 10+ tabs open and drains around 256-512MB of memory…but that may be in part due to caching (where the HDD speed shows) or some other unknown performance-related issue. Oh, and did I mention that I'm running Norton 2008 on this

machine? Yeah, you heard me right…and during idle the processor most of the time stays at 0% usage with occasional spikes to up to 10% utilization.

On a daily basis I am using Microsoft Office, several FTP and SSH applications, an Xserver program (which is a Linux/Sun equivalent version of Windows Remote Desktop Connection) that is known to be a processor hog, WMP10, and a few other little applications. These applications can all run side-by-side without it getting 'slow,' and in all reality they run about as well as my desktop could run them. Sure, if I was to run an engineering application or MATLAB I'm sure things would run slower than a more powerful system…but that is not what this computer is meant for. However, if I were to ever need these applications on the fly I'm sure I could tolerate the relative slowness.

I have not used the application much yet, but GIMP definitely does take its sweet time loading compared to my desktop or 8710p laptop. The CPU is definitely the limiting factor here, and some of the more complex photo-editing techniques will surely take some time on this laptop. But again, a 12" ultraportable is not meant to be a photo-enthusiasts main rig. But, you can run it if you ever need to in a hurry and cannot wait. So far though the processor has handled my needs on GIMP perfectly fine, though I am not asking too much of it right now.

As far as the HDD goes, its slowness does show on occasion. Large file transfers tend to slow the entire system down somewhat (FTP is limited by internet speed, so I do not really see slowdown there), so copying over 40GB of data from a USB connection is going to take time (I tried it). XP boots up pretty quickly despite the 4200RPM drive, and hibernation operations are surprisingly quick. If you are planning on running a large number of HDD intensive applications though, consider purchasing a 1.8" 5400RPM drive with the notebook instead if you are willing to sacrifice some cooling and battery life.

Overall, the system performs very well with office and student tasks despite the apparent lack of power. This is, yet again, evidence that many computers today just are too powerful!

Heat and Noise

The D430 has several things working against it in the cooling department, and I am sure that Dell had a challenge trying to get everything to run cool enough. The frame of the D430 is small and cannot dissipate much heat, and there is only one small fan inside of the notebook directly next to or on top of the processor. The single air vent is not very wide either.

Remember those performance drawbacks I mentioned with the hard drive and ULV processor though? This is where you get the pay off for the trade off!

As previously mentioned, the latest series of Intel ULV processors top out at 9W…and my processor is a 5.5W CPU. Even the small cooling system and thin frame can manage to keep the processor running around 50-60C under most conditions. However, the D430 does get really warm in the upper right quadrant of the notebook where the processor is found. The keyboard gets a little warm near the backspace and special character keys, but the bottom of the laptop (that is made of all alloy metal) gets toasty. Either put a pair of pants on (not shorts) or put a folder or notebook between you and the computer when it is on your lap, and you'll be computing much more comfortably. A plate of metal at 50-60C directly on skin will not feel comfortable.

To put a little more scientific data behind my statements, the following temperature recordings were made with Notebook Hardware Control during the benchmarking and testing of the D430.

	CPU (C)	HDD (C)	Noise
Plugged-in Idle (Always ON)	52	37	Silent
Plugged-in HDTune Test (Always ON)	62	46	Low white noise
Plugged-in PCMark05 Test (Always ON)	75	41	Annoyingly high pitched fan from a few feet away
Battery (Max Battery)	53	39	Silent

(view large image)

Most of the time, the processor's fan on the D430 does not need to run at all (or only at a very slow speed) to maintain the 50-60C temperatures. That means that during general usage the laptop is virtually silent, and you'll only be hearing occasional hard drive clicking sounds. During class lectures or business meetings, this laptop will be dead-silent most of the time.

However, once this laptop gets going with a processor intensive job it is going to complain audibly. You are going to hear it, and so is everyone else a few feet away from you. It is fairly high pitched because the fan is physically smaller, and you are going to notice it. But you are only going to notice it if you push the laptop pretty hard, which is not going to happen during normal office usage.

Keyboard and Touchpad

There is no doubt in my mind that the D430's keyboard is amongst the best I've ever typed on. It may even be THE best I've ever used. There is a little more feedback in the key-presses than my 8710p or the nc8430, and Dell even managed to fit in a full-size keyboard in the 12" frame. The keyboard feels extremely firm, and there is no flex anywhere on the keyboard when using it.

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The keyboard also has a slightly different layout than what I am used to, but I've learned and adjusted. The biggest difference is that the PageUp and PageDown buttons are located above the arrow keys in the lower right corner of the keyboard, but they are within easy reach of the pinky finger and I prefer to use them instead of scrolling now. The F1-F12 keys up top are a little too thin for my tastes though, as are the Esc, Home, End, Insert, and Delete keys that are found in the function button row. Dell could probably have made those 17 keys full size had their design department thought a little more creatively.

The pointer stick is also pleasantly surprising, and I've found it to be very responsive to my touch. Controlling the directional movement of the mouse is fairly fluid, and I've found it to be less clunky than the sticks found on the HP Compaq notebooks.

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The dual mouse buttons are also quiet during operation, however the mousepad is not as nice as I would have liked. I do miss the middle (third) mouse button featured on the HP Compaq machines. However, I did recently discover that the Dell mouse drive interprets a left+right click as a middle click, so maybe I'll adjust. But I doubt it will ever be the same.

Running my fingers over the touchpad feels fine, and the mousepad is fairly responsive so movements are smooth. At first I had to adjust a little bit to the touch and operation of this trackpad, since I was moving from the HP laptops to the D430, but in the end I have found the trackpad to be very responsive and useful.

Input and Output Ports, Wireless, and Battery

With such a small frame, one would not expect many ports to be found on the D430, but the laptop does manage to squeeze in the essentials.

Left side (view large image)

From left to right: Kensington lock slot, audio-in/microphone, audio-out/headphones, PCMCIA slot, SmartCard reader beneath the PCMCIA slot, and an SD card slot.

Right side (view large image)

From left to right: WiFi toggle switch, power button.

Back (view large image)

From left to right: Ethernet, modem, 2x USB, VGA-out, 1x USB (also used for DVD drive connection), IEEE 1394 Firewire 400 port, and the AC power jack.

The Intel 3945 802.11a/b/g WiFi card works perfectly fine. I have no issues connecting to the networks I frequent, no disconnections, and few problems at all. The only problem is that when resuming from standby or hibernate, I sometimes have to 'reboot' the WiFi card (via a repair option available by right clicking the WiFi task bar icon) to get it to connect again. But I do not think this is D430-specific, as I've seen this happen on many other laptops.

Another interesting feature about the WiFi card is a hardware switch that can toggle the card on and off, and a quick flick of the switch can make a popup list appear with all local networks shown. When turned off, the switch's light supposedly tells you if there is an unprotected network nearby, but since I only use encrypted networks I cannot yet test that feature. However, the switch does require a little bit too much of a nudge to toggle the on/off position of the switch.

(view large image)

I find the switch to be more annoying than anything for me. I cannot benefit from it, and it gives a little too much between the "On" and "Check Networks" positions. Even more so, the button is hard to toggle to the "Off" position and yet too easy to turn it back "On." Overall, this button is a worthless feature for the laptop and the space should have been used to install a side USB port which would have been more useful.

In the last month or so, I've had to travel extensively with the laptop, and often without the benefit of a wall plug nearby. As previously mentioned, this is one of the large benefits of having a ULV processor and low powered parts. Even with the relatively puny 6-cell battery, the laptop still squeezes out an incredible battery life.

With the screen at the maximum brightness, wireless ON, in the presentation power mode (which keeps the processor down to 800MHz), and while performing moderately difficult tasks on the D430, the laptop managed to clock in at a battery life of about **2 hours and 16 minutes**. Considering I was frequently using the computer, accessing data and playing music, etc, etc, that is a fairly good lifetime. Estimates indicated that under heavy load the laptop should still last over an hour at least, possibly more than 90 minutes.

With the screen at the minimum brightness, wireless ON, presentation mode, and leaving the computer at idle most of the time while occasionally typing this review and browsing the internet, the laptop managed to score an impressive **3 hours and 18 minutes**.

During other tests, there were times that my estimated battery life was 4-5 hours, but I was never able to actually achieve that projected battery life. But the potential is apparently there.

One concern I am sure users will have is the power button on the side of the notebook. It could potentially be easy to hit when the laptop is in a backpack or luggage or briefcase. Everyone knows that an active laptop is such a small space could cause heat related failures, and Dell was aware of this as well. Fortunately, Dell programmed the BIOS of the laptop to NOT turn on if the laptop is closed. If you hit the power button and the D430 boots while shut, the POST sequence will recognize that the computer needs to shut down, which protects the laptop.

Operating System and Software

Thankfully, the D430 comes with a minimum of extra software and bloatware to clog the system. The D430 can be equipped with either XP or Vista, though I cannot imagine why anyone would want Vista on this machine.

XP performance was definitely snappier then the test Vista installation I had running on the notebook. There is no recovery partition on the D430 though (since the HDDs configuration options can be as small as 30GB), but this is offset by the fact that all recovery CDs will come with the notebook. There are only three: XP CD, Drivers CD, and the PowerDVD software CD. Unless you purchase a notebook with the fingerprint reader or require the business security suites that should be all you get with the D430. Less really can be more!

Customer Support

In the past few weeks, I have had numerous contacts with Dell's Customer Support teams regarding both my D430 notebook and my XPS 420 desktop. While I have not needed to contact them about technical issues yet, I will say that Dell more than impressed me during the purchasing phases of both systems. Furthermore, when I needed to have some CDs and information sent to me they did so without hesitation.

Given how well they responded then, and how easily available the technical support is both by phone and online in the Dell chat rooms, I believe that if I ever do have a support related question with either system Dell will definitely respond in a timely and professional manner to solve the issue at hand.

Also, for those interested: Dell does maintain its own customer forums in which Dell customers can help other Dell customers. Even non-Dell owners can sign up, help, and ask questions. There is a good amount of information on those forums regarding specific systems and circumstances, which has proven to be very useful when setting up all my systems or troubleshooting them.

Overall, my future experiences with Dell look to be very promising, which is a welcome turnaround considering how far in disrepair I felt Dell's services were a few years ago. Times have changed and Dell definitely has turned their act around for the better.

Conclusion

Overall, I would have to say that the Dell D430 has plenty of positive aspects to the notebook, but there are also a few flaws evident as well. Most laptops are not going to be perfect, and it is simply a matter of user preferences that determine what features of the notebook you love, and what flaws you cannot live with at all.

As an ultraportable machine though, the Dell D430 strikes a great balance between features, portability, and price. The amount of power inside of the laptop, even though it is a meager amount, is more than enough power to run 95% of your daily/average computing tasks. And for those who need more power, there are

dual-core options available. Sure, the laptop admittedly has flaws like the horrid speaker and the slightly-below-average screen, but the D430 has too many good things going for it to turn it away as a potential system.

But notebooks in this category are largely evaluated on portability, longevity, and build quality. The Dell Latitude D430 definitely managed to excel in all three categories. This laptop is the best built I think I've ever owned, the battery life is respectable given the notebook's size, and the notebook's size itself is a huge boon to portability. I cannot stress enough how much easier a 12.1" system is on a student's backpack (or a business professional's briefcase), and how easy it is to just take the notebook around and be prepared for any situation.

Business professionals, college students, and even home users should seriously consider the Latitude D430 notebook, as it always delivers when you need it to most.

Pros

- Cheap when purchased used from Dell Outlet.
- Still a good value when purchased new from Dell.
- Excellent chassis sturdiness, above average LCD bezel sturdiness.
- Top notch keyboard, average touchpad.
- Incredibly tiny laptop that still packs a respectable punch.
- Sharp screen when viewed head on.
- Ambient light sensor actually works well.
- Low powered single core and dual core processors available, all of them being speedy enough for general usage.
- Respectable battery life, smart BIOS that prevent notebook from booting when closed.

Cons

- External DVD drive (for some this may be a pro though).
- Average to below-average viewing angles.
- HDD transfer speeds
- Worthless WiFi switch, could have been another USB port.
- Needs another USB port, only three on the system.
- Horrid speaker.